

STATEMENT OF SUE MASICA, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 326, TO AMEND THE YUMA CROSSING NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA ACT OF 2000 TO ADJUST THE BOUNDARY OF THE YUMA CROSSING NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA AND TO EXTEND THE AUTHORITY OF THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE UNDER THAT ACT.

SEPTEMBER 29, 2005

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 326, a bill to amend the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area Act of 2000 to adjust the boundary of the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area and to extend the authority of the Secretary of the Interior to provide assistance under that Act.

The Department supports the proposed boundary change which is based on the findings of the 2002 management plan for the National Heritage Area (NHA). However, we do not see a need, at this time, to extend the authority of the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to provide assistance for an additional five years. We also recommend that the bill be amended to include an official map reference similar to the maps used for other National Heritage Areas.

H.R. 326 would amend Section 3(b) of the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area Act of 2000, Public Law 106-319, to adjust the boundary of the National Heritage Area to reflect the boundaries outlined and approved in the management plan, and would amend Section 7 of Public Law 106-319 to extend the sunset for assistance that could be provided from September 30, 2015, to September 30, 2020. The original authorized funding of \$10,000,000 would not be changed.

Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area was authorized by P.L. 106-319, signed on October 19, 2000. The Department supported the legislation to establish the NHA at hearings in both the House and Senate during the 106th Congress. Since establishment, the National Park Service (NPS) has worked with the Yuma Crossing NHA staff and the community to develop the management plan required in the legislation. That plan was completed in July 2002 and approved by the Secretary in December 2003.

Yuma has been a home to Native Americans for nearly 1,500 years, prior to becoming a city at the junction of the Colorado and Gila Rivers. The Spanish “discovered” the area seventy years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. As Americans moved west, Yuma became one of the stopping points for those following gold and fortune as well as a key military post. Yuma also prospered as a port city, then a railroad town, and finally as a link on the first southern transcontinental highway. By the 20th century Yuma continued to rely on water, this time with major government dam and diversion projects on the Colorado River that brought the ability of year-round agricultural production.

The authorizing legislation established a boundary for the heritage area of approximately 22 square miles based upon early studies that showed great potential for natural, cultural and recreational resources within that area. Once the NHA was authorized, work began on the management plan. The plan refined and further developed the concepts outlined in the feasibility study, dividing the NHA into seven districts that feature natural, cultural and recreational resources consistent with the authorizing legislation, incorporating opportunities for economic development, and acknowledging the importance of maintaining residential areas.

At the same time, Yuma Crossing NHA was also aware of the need to ensure that the goals of the management plan could be achieved financially and were acceptable to the entire community.

Taking these elements into consideration, the NHA board developed the management plan which included a proposal for a new boundary. The management plan received extensive public involvement and the NHA board used NPS planning models in addition to National Environmental Policy Act and National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 guidelines to develop and analyze their options.

Three alternatives were developed for public involvement and review. H.R. 326 includes the preferred alternative for the new boundary which would continue to meet the intent and goals for which the heritage area was established. We recommend that the bill be amended to remove the written description of the boundary adjustment currently in H.R. 326 and to replace it with a map reference that shows the new boundary. NPS would be happy to provide this map which would resemble boundary maps for other heritage areas. The written description of the boundary adjustment found in the bill, as well as a reference to the map included on page 40 of the “Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area Management Plan”, could be included in the report language for the bill.

The second part of H.R. 326 would extend the period in which the NHA can receive assistance from the Secretary for an additional five years. The present sunset is 2015. Yuma Crossing is an active, flourishing NHA and is receiving funding within the limits set by Congress each fiscal year. While some extensions have been authorized for other heritage areas, they have occurred

much closer to their expiration dates, and with very specific needs identified. At this time we see no specific need for this extension and recommend that Section 2 of the bill be deleted.

We commend the NHA board, members, and partners, as well as the citizens in and around Yuma, Arizona, for their time and commitment to this project. We look forward to continuing to work with them to achieve the goals of the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area.

That concludes my prepared remarks. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.